I. Overview

The History Department is currently updating its assessment plan to develop a more systematic and comprehensive means of assessing the department’s new student learning objectives. During the 2008-9 academic year, the following student learning objectives were approved by the faculty to replace the previous objectives:

1) Students shall be able to write a clear expository essay in which they develop a coherent historical argument and marshal evidence to support an interpretation.
2) Students shall demonstrate adequate reading skills of primary and secondary historical sources.
3) Students shall use citation standards appropriate to the discipline of history (Chicago Manual of Style).

All three student learning objectives were assessed for the 2008-9 academic year. (question #1) These student learning objectives are a notable improvement from previous years in that the goals are specific to the discipline of history and can be adequately assessed. The learning objectives are extremely integrated; each specific objective enhances the other objectives so that a cumulative learning experience can be obtained. These objectives fulfill the needs of the History Department and also help fulfill the university student learning objectives (see http://www.csus.edu/programassessment/University%20Learning%20Outcomes.html).

A total of thirty-four written assignments from the following courses were used for analysis: History 005 (Survey Modern Western Civilization), 51 (World Civilization, 1600 to present), 100 (Introduction to Historical Skills), 197a (Senior Research Seminar, U.S.), 197b (Senior Research Seminar, World). These courses incorporate all levels of difficulty in the major and are requirements for the major. The written samples were randomly selected to give a range of responses and did not give preference for better/poorer samples. All full-time faculty teaching these courses were approached to solicit writing samples from their classes. By soliciting samples from all upper division seminar courses, a more credible analysis can be achieved in regards to students successfully exhibiting the skills listed in the student learning objectives. (question #2a – part 1)

The results of assessment will be used to shed light on areas in which the department sufficiently meets the level of achievement for the learning objectives, and also those areas that need improvement. While this is the first time that the History Department has used assessment tables/quantitative information to interpret student performance, the assessment committee finds them especially useful and will continue to employ this methodology to highlight student progress from year to year. (question #4) For the 2009-10 academic year, a new survey will be developed to address areas of concern and general insight as to the success of the program. The results of the survey can be used on a yearly basis to help improve the course content. (question #3a) The success of this approach will be seen in the graphs and data of student performance.
(question #3b) Overall, every year’s assessment report will be used to determine areas of improvement and to help faculty in adjusting their courses to facilitate the needed improvement. (question #5)

The individual assignments from each class were:

1. **History 005** – Eight written samples were selected from the fall semester of 2008 assignment focusing on a book essay. All students were to write a 4-6 page essay on Heda Kovaly’s *Under a Cruel Star*.
2. **History 51** – Five written samples were selected from the spring 2009 assignment focusing on a book essay. All students were to write a 4-6 page essay on Stephen Kinzer’s *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*.
3. **History 100** – Twelve written samples from three course sections from the spring of 2009 were selected. Two of the courses assigned a research paper, while one course assigned a research paper prospectus.
4. **History 197a** – Six papers were selected from two courses sections from spring 2009. Both courses assigned a lengthy research paper (ranging from 17 – 25 pages).
5. **History 197b** – Three papers were selected from one course section of spring 2009 that assigned a lengthy research paper. (question #2a – part 2)

Overall, the results of 2008-9 assessment show that student performance, based on the three learning objectives, improved significantly when comparing progress from lower-division coursework, through the Hist 100 basic skills course to the senior research seminars. (question #2b) Of the three learning objectives, students displayed the greatest improvement in their ability to read primary and secondary sources as well as their use of appropriate citation standards. (question #2c) While students showed improvement in their writing skills, department faculty should place greater emphasis on forming arguments and developing grammar skills in upper division courses. (question #2d)

**II. Assessment of individual student learning objectives:**

**A. Expository Essay** – students must be able to produce an argument and marshal evidence to support their claims.

1. **History 005** (8 samples)
   a. Proper argument (1), improper argument (5), lack of argument (2)
   b. Use of some (0 – 3 sources) evidence (8), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (), no use of evidence ()
   c. Correct grammar usage (1), incorrect grammar usage (7)

2. **History 51** (5 samples)
   a. Proper argument (2), improper argument (2), lack of argument (1)
   b. Use of some (0 – 3 sources) evidence (5), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (), no use of evidence ()
   c. Correct grammar usage (3), incorrect grammar usage (2)
3. History 100 (12 samples)
   a. Proper argument (4), improper argument (5), lack of argument (1)
   b. Use of some (0 – 3 sources) evidence (1), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (11), no use of evidence ()
   c. Correct grammar usage (7), incorrect grammar usage (5)

4. History 197a (6 samples)
   a. Proper argument (1), improper argument (), lack of argument (3)
   b. Use of some (0 – 3 sources) evidence (), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (6), no use of evidence ()
   c. Correct grammar usage (3), incorrect grammar usage (3)

5. History 197b (3 samples)
   a. Proper argument (2), improper argument (1), lack of argument ()
   b. Use of some (0 – 3 sources) evidence (), use of significant amount (4 or more) of evidence (3), no use of evidence ()
   c. Correct grammar usage (1), incorrect grammar usage (2)

Section Summary:
The majority of students show significant improvement in regards to forming arguments, using evidence to support their arguments, and writing in grammatically correct English. Less than half of the lower division students could form an argument or write in grammatically correct English. Once students completed the upper division courses, they showed a greater understanding of what constitutes an argument and could properly explain their points using both primary and secondary sources. The biggest improvement for this learning objective is in the use of sources. Only one student sample from both upper division seminar courses used less than four sources for his/her paper. The remaining twenty students used a greater number of sources for their papers and this is a positive outcome.

B. Reading Skills – students must be able to comprehend both primary and secondary historical sources.

1. History 005 (8 samples)
   a. primary sources –
      use of primary sources (8),
      lack of use of primary sources (),
      demonstrates comprehension of primary source (6),
      lack of comprehension of primary sources (2)
   b. secondary –
      use of secondary sources (),
      lack of use of secondary sources (8),
      demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (),
      lack of comprehension of secondary sources ()
2. History 51 (5 samples)
   a. primary sources –
      use of primary sources (),
      lack of use of primary sources (5),
      demonstrates comprehension of primary source (),
      lack of comprehension of primary sources ()
   b. secondary –
      use of secondary sources (5),
      lack of use of secondary sources (),
      demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (5),
      lack of comprehension of secondary sources ()

3. History 100 (12 samples)
   a. primary sources –
      use of primary sources (12),
      lack of use of primary sources (),
      demonstrates comprehension of primary source (10),
      lack of comprehension of primary sources (2)
   b. secondary –
      use of secondary sources (12),
      lack of use of secondary sources (),
      demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (12),
      lack of comprehension of secondary sources ()

4. History 197a (6 samples)
   a. primary sources –
      use of primary sources (6),
      lack of use of primary sources (),
      demonstrates comprehension of primary source (6),
      lack of comprehension of primary sources ()
   b. secondary –
      use of secondary sources (6),
      lack of use of secondary sources (),
      demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (6),
      lack of comprehension of secondary sources ()

5. History 197b (3 samples)
   a. primary sources –
      use of primary sources (3),
      lack of use of primary sources (),
      demonstrates comprehension of primary source (3),
      lack of comprehension of primary sources ()
b. secondary –
   use of secondary sources (3),
   lack of use of secondary sources (),
   demonstrates comprehension of secondary source (3),
   lack of comprehension of secondary sources ()

**Section Summary:** The majority of students can comprehend secondary sources properly in all levels of coursework. For the lower division courses (005, 51), students either analyzed one primary source or one secondary source. There were no additional sources analyzed for either assignment. However, once students reached the upper division seminar courses they were required to incorporate both secondary and primary sources in their writing. All of the students in the 100 course were able to use and comprehend secondary sources, while a few students had difficulty in comprehending their primary sources. This obstacle was clearly resolved in the 197 seminar courses where all students both used and comprehended primary and secondary sources in their writing.

**C. Citation Standards** – both footnotes and quotations are to follow the *Chicago Manual of Style.*

1. History 005 (8 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (8), improper footnote citation (), proper footnote citation ()

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (3),
      block quote properly formatted (),
      improper quotation format (6),
      proper quotation format (),
      improper citation of text (1),
      proper citation of text (7),
      no quotation of text in essay (),

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (7), improper bibliography (1), proper bibliography ()

2. History 51 (5 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (5), improper footnote citation (), proper footnote citation ()

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (1),
      block quote properly formatted (),
      improper quotation format (3),
      proper quotation format (),
      improper citation of text (1),
      proper citation of text (4),
      no quotation of text in essay (1),

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (5), improper bibliography (), proper bibliography ()
3. History 100 (12 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (), improper footnote citation (6), proper footnote citation (6)

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (1),
      block quote properly formatted (7),
      improper quotation format (4),
      proper quotation format (8),
      improper citation of text (2),
      proper citation of text (9)
      no quotation of text in essay (),

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (), improper bibliography (4), proper bibliography (8)

4. History 197a (6 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (), improper footnote citation (2), proper footnote citation (4)

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (2),
      block quote properly formatted (2),
      improper quotation format (1),
      proper quotation format (5),
      improper citation of text (1),
      proper citation of text (4),
      no quotation of text in essay ()

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (), improper bibliography (1), proper bibliography (5)

5. History 197b (3 samples):
   a. footnotes – no footnotes (), improper footnote citation (3), proper footnote citation ()

   b. quotations –
      block quote improperly formatted (),
      block quote properly formatted (3),
      improper quotation format (),
      proper quotation format (3),
      improper citation of text (),
      proper citation of text (2),
      no quotation of text in essay ()

   c. bibliography – no bibliography (), improper bibliography (3), proper bibliography ()
Section Summary: In terms of citations, students show a dramatic improvement in their skills between the lower division courses (005/51) to that of the upper division courses (100/197a,b). There is a marked improvement in the ability of the students to cite texts and quote passages properly. Of the nine student samples from History 197a and b, only two students quoted passages and texts incorrectly. The remaining eight students all adequately demonstrated quotation skills. Overall, students who complete the 197 seminar course are relatively competent in writing bibliographies and footnotes, but have mastered an ability to cite texts and quote passages.

III. Table of Performance

These tables of performance illustrate the degree to which students showed improvement in regards to the department’s student learning objectives.

I. Student Learning Objective (A) – Expository Essay
Argument

Grammar
II. Student Learning Objective (B) – Reading Skills

Primary Sources 1

Primary Sources 2
III. Student Learning Objective (C) – Citation Standards

Footnotes

Block Quotes and Quotation Format
Section Summary: The graphs are especially reflective of the strengths and weaknesses of student writing. Students show remarkable improvement in their use and comprehension of sources. They also show significant improvement in their writing skills by the time they complete the 100 course. In terms of citations, students need additional guidance in citing texts and formatting proper bibliographies. As well, student writing skills still need attention so that students continue to improve their writing. Overall, students show improvement in their writing and comprehension skills over the course of their undergraduate studies.
IV. Conclusion of Assessment

For the academic year 2008-9, students enrolled as history majors showed marked improvement in their skills relating to the department’s student learning. The revised student learning objectives were implemented by the department and proved to be quite successful in more effectively measuring student progress when comparing performance in the lower-division survey courses with the mid-level historical skills course (Hist 100) and the senior level writing seminar (Hist 197). This assessment does indicate that more attention to citation and bibliography as well as to selective writing skills will further improve student performance.

During the 2009-10 academic year, a larger sample of coursework from both semesters will be analyzed. We will also continue to refine our data collection and data analysis methods. In addition, a new exit interview and student survey will be developed to supplement the information gathered through the writing samples. This survey and interview process will be incorporated into the 2009-10 assessment report.